

The Pittsylvania Packet

Fall 2004

Number 54



**Pittsylvania Historical Society
Chatham, Virginia**

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President's Report

I would like to take this space to remind each of our Society members of the annual Callands Potpourri. This year will be our 24th outing on the grounds of the Callands Clerk's Office and Courthouse. There will be crafts galore and food of all kinds. This will also be a special event for the Society as we will be offering for sale two republished books of our former President Herman Melton. These books have been out of print for several years and have been selling on E-bay for twice the original price. Hope to see you at Callands.

The quarterly membership meeting will be held on Monday, October 18th. The program will be very interesting to all historians. See the related article in the *Packet*.

Our Summer Picnic at the 1813 Clerk's Office was a big success and enjoyed by all who attended. Alisa L. Bailey, Virginia Tourism Corporation, reported on tourism in Virginia and in Pittsylvania County. The Society is working hard to promote tourism and you will be hearing more about our efforts in the near future.

- Langhorne Jones, Jr., President

Note from The Editor

As this will be the last issue of the *Pittsylvania Packet* until the beginning of next year, I want to take the opportunity to thank all the contributors who have helped make the *Packet* a worthwhile publication this year. Without you, the *Packet* would not happen!

I have a request: the PHS has a faded newspaper

clipping of a copy of a photograph, circa 1870, of Main Street in Chatham. The photograph shows a carriage and some furniture out in the street; from the caption, evidently the photograph was taken in front of an undertakers and a furniture store. I would like to borrow a clearer copy, or the original, of the image to publish in the *Packet*.

I would also like to remind everyone that the Pittsylvania Historical Society's publications and map make great Christmas gifts (as well as gifts on any occasion — birthdays, etc.). I hope everyone has a great fall and happy holidays!

- Sarah E. Mitchell

Callands Festival: October 2nd, 2004

The 24th annual Callands Festival will be held on October 2nd, from 10 AM to 4 PM. Vendors will be selling wares, reenactors will be on the grounds, and good food will be available. The new reprints of Herman Melton's books will also be sold for the first time.

Fall Meeting: October 18th, 2004

The Pittsylvania Historical Society is pleased to announce that the speaker at the fall meeting will be Tom Perry. His program is "J. E. B. Stuart's Last Ride: The Battle of Yellow Tavern," a one hour slide program that covers Stuart's life, with emphasis on his last four days (he was wounded at the Battle of Yellow Tavern, just north of Richmond, and died on May 12, 1864). This talk also touches on the preservation of Stuart's birthplace, Laurel Hill, in Ararat, Virginia (just north of Mount Airy, North Carolina); the

preservation of Jubal Early's homeplace, in which Perry is involved; and the loss of Civil War battlefields in the Richmond area including Yellow Tavern.

J. E. B. Stuart had local ties to Pittsylvania County; he spent time during his childhood at Whitethorn, his maternal grandparents' home near Gretna. His cousin Charles Dabney practiced law in Chatham before and after the Civil War. His cousin Chiswell Dabney (Charles' brother) practiced law in Chatham after the Civil War; during the war, he served as J. E. B. Stuart's aide de camp.

Speaker Tom Perry grew up two miles from Jeb Stuart's Birthplace. He is a 1983 graduate of Virginia Tech where he studied under noted Civil War historian Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr. In 1990, he founded the J. E. B. Stuart Birthplace Preservation Trust, Inc., which has preserved 75 acres of the Stuart property, including the house site where James Ewell Brown Stuart was born on February 6, 1833.

He is the author of *Ascent to Glory, The Genealogy of J. E. B. Stuart* and a completed manuscript on Patrick County, Virginia in the Civil War. He is writing *Stuart's Birthplace, A History of the Laurel Hill Farm* and is collecting and editing Stuart papers for future publication.

The meeting will be held at the 1813 Clerk's Office in Chatham at 7:30 PM. The 1813 Clerk's Office is located behind the Chatham Town Hall on Court Place.

Capitol Tree and Parade in Chatham November 28th, 2004

The Virginia Spirit Parade, with a theme of

different aspects of Virginia life and history, will begin at 12:30 PM on November 28th at the Old Dutch Grocery Store. Students and other youth are invited to participate.

The parade will end at the Pittsylvania County Courthouse. The crowd will then welcome the Capitol Holiday Tree as it comes through town en route to Washington, D. C. Christmas music will be played, and refreshments will be offered.

Christmas in Historic Chatham December 2-3rd, 2004

Christmas in Historic Chatham will feature vendors on the streets, open houses, Christmas caroling, etc. For more information, watch for later articles in the *Star-Tribune*.

Deadline for Submissions

Please submit any announcements, articles, etc. for the next issue of *The Pittsylvania Packet* by December 10th, 2004. Queries and letters from our readers are always welcome!

Reprint of Herman Melton's Mill Books

by Henry Hurt

Historian Herman Melton's widely admired books on Pittsylvania County, Virginia, grist mills are back at last, after being out of print for years.

Both titles — *Pittsylvania's Eighteenth-Century Grist Mills* and *Pittsylvania's Nineteenth-Century Grist Mills* — will be on sale October 2nd at the Callands Festival. The books, handsome hardbacks with dust jackets and many photos and illustrations, are sold for \$23 each.

“We are very pleased to be able to bring back Herman Melton’s great work on early Pittsylvania history and industry,” stated Langhorne Jones, Jr., president of the Pittsylvania County Historical Society. “We are particularly grateful to Herman for his generosity in granting the Historical Society the rights to reprint the books. These books are treasure chests for researchers interested in family history and genealogy.”

The Eighteenth Century book (178 pages fully indexed) was published in 1989, followed by the Nineteenth Century book (244 pages fully indexed) in 1991. Second-hand copies of both books have sold recently on the Internet at \$50 to \$75.

“The author argues that these mills did more than grind wheat and corn for local citizens prior to their decline through the onset of railroads, steam and electricity,” according to the jacket blurb. “They frequently served as post offices, polling places and retail outlets. Mills inevitably evolved into social and recreational centers that attracted churches and schools.”

For those unable to purchase the grist mill books at the Callands Festival, they will be available after October 4th at the Historical Society’s normal outlets for book sales.



*J. Wyatt Whitehead, Sr., (circa 1870), from Maud Carter Clement, **Writings of Maud Carter Clement**, Pittsylvania Historical Society, 1982.*

Some Recollections of My Grandfather

(From notes of Judge Langhorne Jones, Sr.)

My grandfather, J. Wyatt Whitehead, Sr., was a citizen of high Christian moral standards, dedicated to any cause he fostered, a devoted father and a loyal friend.

Grandfather, “Wyatt” as he was known to his friends, was the son of Richard Whitehead, Jr. and Eliza Carolyn Brown. He was born on May 24th, 1838 and died January 11th, 1919. He married Nancy Eugenia Tredway, daughter of William Marshall Tredway, who was a member of Congress and a judge of the circuit court.

My grandfather had ten children. His wife Nancy Eugenia died on May 22, 1886 at the age of 38 and he never again married. My mother, Mary Emma Whitehead, was the second of two daughters and the sixth child of the union.

For many years we either lived in his home or he in ours. He had a capacity to tell excellent stories, giving facts in a clear and concise way, without exaggerating, and making all accounts come to life.

I can remember in the summer he would sit on the front porch, the family, neighbors and friends would gather to hear him tell stories. When one episode would be finished he would stop and say, "We will continue next week." And the next week the same group would again assemble. The stories I remember the best related to his experiences as a lieutenant in Company I of 53rd Regiment of Pittsylvania County, (also known as Company A). The details of names connected with the stories I cannot remember, but the general gist I can.

Grandfather, who was born in the Staunton River District of Pittsylvania County, near Renan, told of his coming to Chatham as a country boy, obtaining a job with Mr. Jesse Hargrave, who operated a general store at the corner of Main and Court Place, where now stands the Fidelity American Bank (currently BB&T Bank). He lived in the back of the store and his wages were 25 cents a week, with board. I recall his telling that Mr. Hargrave would scold him for using too much string to tie up a package, calling it wasteful. I could never understand how he could exist on such low wages, but he would always say he obtained a raise by being diligent and attending to business and he admonished us to always do likewise.

As to stories of the War (the War between the States, sometimes erroneously call the Civil War), he told of being "mustered in" the company of which Dr. Rawley W. Martin was in command as a colonel. They would drill in front of the Courthouse, using the basement to store their arms and equipment. He knew the names of all members of the company, who were volunteers, and those who could keep step and

those who could not. When called on to report for duty with the other Confederate forces there was a great gathering of citizens to wish them well, both ladies and gentlemen. While there was a lot of kissing and crying, the mood seemed to be one of gaiety and merriment. They were expecting to return in a reasonable time as the war would soon be over. It was more like they were going on a pleasant adventure than to face battles, death, and destruction.

He told, how after several engagements with the enemy, that at night, after a battle, they would crawl through the lines and exchange tobacco with the Union soldiers for food. His description of the scant rations and hunger was quite appalling — that they ate parched corn and any kind of food which could be obtained.

His account of the Battle of Gettysburg, the charge at Cemetery Ridge, and the death of many of his friends, was quite graphic and given in detail. Here he was wounded, having received bullet wounds in his leg, one in the arm and one in the shoulder. It was raining hard that night and he lay on the ground in a puddle of water. How the next morning a squad of Union cavalry passed and the officer in charge stopped and asked if there was anything they could do for him. To which grandfather said, "Could you move me out of this water to higher ground." To which the Union officer commanded two of his squad to "dismount and move the lieutenant to a spot under yonder tree and move him gently." He was very thankful and the officer in charge was profusely thanked.

His description of his suffering and the surrounding conditions almost brought tears to one's eyes. He described the mourning and cries of the wounded as well as the horrors of the battle and its aftermath. After three days he was taken prisoner

and treated for his wounds, he also described the treatment. His wounds were cured and he gradually recovered and was sent to a Union prison on Johnson's Island on Lake Erie where he was confined until the war's end and he was discharged.

He described in detail life in the prison, the cramped quarters, cold, discomfort and suffering; how the rations were cut, in retaliation for the way it was alleged the Union prisoners were treated in the South, until the hunger was almost unbearable. They were so hungry they would catch wharf rats and eat them. That he would sit patiently by a rat hole, having his fingers and hand outstretched to illustrate, and when a rat would appear he would catch it with great satisfaction, skin, clean, cook, and eat it. He was able to catch three rats in this manner. I would always ask him, "Grandpa what did they taste like?" And his reply was, "Something like a squirrel." I have heard him tell this story a good many times and it was always amusing to the young people.

Grandfather gave a graphic account of "winding" his way home after the war's end, with no money and sometimes walking, by way of Washington, Richmond, and on to Danville. To get from Danville to Chatham was a problem as Danville was occupied by Union soldiers and exit from the city was only by permission.

One story at the end always fascinated me and I wish I could remember the name of the man he befriended and obtained a way for the man and himself to get home.

This man, I will call him Smith for lack of knowledge of his name, lost a leg in the war. He was helpless and had no one to assist him. His home was near Callands in Pittsylvania County, and of course had no way to get home as he could not notify his people.

Grandfather, having pity on him, went to the commanding officer of the Union troops and sought to obtain an ambulance to convey the wounded companion to Chatham. He was told by the commanding officer there was no chance of such a request being honored, that his soldiers would all be ambushed and killed. After much persuasion and promise that he, Grandfather, would personally see to the safety and return of the ambulance, permission was granted for use of the ambulance to be accompanied by a squad of cavalry. So Grandfather, Mr. Smith in the ambulance, accompanied by the soldiers and drawn by horses, drove to Chatham. Here Grandfather directed the soldiers to take the wounded man to his home, following his directions to the place, then to return and report to him in Chatham.

The next morning the ambulance and its company reported as directed and the one in charge said to Grandfather, "Lieutenant, if you can get us off again please do so. When we arrived at Mr. Smith's house I have never seen such joy. They killed chickens, made hot bread and cooked meat and I've never had such a meal as was set out for us. We were royally treated." The soldiers and ambulance were dispatched to Danville and he assumed they arrived safely.

Local Lady Leads the Way

by Patricia B. Mitchell

In *The Women of the South in War Times* (Revised Edition, 1924), author Matthew Page Andrews credited two Virginia women with leading a drive for supplementary funding for the American Hospital at Neuilly, a Paris suburb, during World War I.

At the United Daughters of the Confederacy

convention in Chattanooga subsequent to the entry of the United States into the war, "Miss Nellie C. Preston, President of the Virginia Division, called attention to the work of the American hospital[s] in France, mentioning Neuilly above the others."

UDC President-General Miss Mary B. Poppenheim of Charleston, South Carolina, responded by obtaining passage of a resolution establishing a bed at the hospital for an annual contribution from the UDC of \$600.

Mrs. W. C. N. Merchant of Chatham, Virginia, suggested to the convention that the bed be named after Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, and her motion carried unanimously. That action prompted an outpouring of further response: UDC organizations from 36 states funded 70 additional beds, each honoring a Confederate leader.

"Among the names of Southern leaders who had beds endowed in their names in France were: Davis, Lee, Cleburne, Jackson, Gordon, the Johnstons, Richard Jackson, Beauregard, Mitchell, Vance, Heath, Semmes, Wheeler, Forrest, Hood, Price, Stephens, Breckenridge, Zollicoffer, Maury, Cabell, King, Hampton, McWhirter and Ryan."

Notes

Matthew Page Andrews, *The Women of the South in War Times*, New Edition Revised, was published by the Norman, Remington, Co., Baltimore, in 1924 (a copy of the book is available at the Chatham branch of the Pittsylvania County Public Library). The first edition of the book had been published in 1920. The above account is found on pages 449-456;

The American Hospital of Paris at Neuilly continues as a noted institution today (see website);

Mrs. Merchant was the wife of the local railroad stationmaster in Chatham, and lived at 226 Whittle Street in Chatham. She was one of the early leaders of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and served as its President-General 1927-29;

The Merchants lost three infant daughters (twins Adeline and Margaret in 1903 and Mary Randolph in 1913); their oldest daughter Lillian Maude was born in 1890 and died in 1899;

Mr. and Mrs. Merchant's home in Chatham was built by James M. Whittle around 1861 (see WPA article by Mattie S. Meadows), as an early step in his project of developing "Whittleton" (now lower Whittle Street; during intervening periods the street has been known as Ridge Street, and Merchant Street). The structure served briefly as rectory for the Emmanuel Episcopal Church, then as home for attorney / famed Episcopalian clergyman / former Confederate cavalry officer (and cousin of General JEB Stuart) Chiswell Dabney (and his family, plus his brother, attorney Charles Dabney), prior to its becoming the Merchant residence. It is currently the home of Russell and Susan Hedrick and family;

Research assistance was provided by Mary Catherine Plaster, Henry H. Mitchell, and Sarah E. Mitchell.



Going to the Store

by Dail Yeatts

My father and mother were the Rev. G. Dewey Yeatts and Artie Watlington Yeatts. Our family lived in the 1930's on the Dry Fork Road at the east corner of what is now the I. H. Powell Road. We called it the Gold Mine Road.

I remember a Hupmobile that we owned. When we had to go places on it we usually had to push it to get it started. One day Mama told Daddy to go to

the store which was a mile away. The store was located near the home of Oscar Stowe and was operated by him. It was a typical Depression-era country store. Only a few staple items, animal feed, and a gas hand pump were available. It was a good place for the men to sit and talk.

We kids, Elsie, Faye, Helen, Dail, and Alma, helped push the car. Our baby sister, Rachel, stayed at home with Mama. Harold rode in the car since he was too small to push. Daddy also helped push and would jump in the car when we got up some speed, put the transmission in gear and let out on the clutch to turn the motor. There was a long hill about half way to the store. All of us got in the car on the hill and Daddy jumped in with us all the way down to the bottom where we had to ford the Dixon Creek. Pushing the car up the next hill was pretty tough.

We did stop to rest at intervals and Daddy would take the gas line to the carburetor loose and have me blow in the gas tank to blow out any trash that might be lodged in the line.

We pushed that car all the way to the store and back home and it never started. I guess that is where the phrase, "family car", got its title — it took the whole family to crank it!

The Hupmobile died soon after that pushing incident. Daddy finally got it started and was on his way to town when the radiator cap blew off. Steam and oil shot up in the air, covering the windshield. The car passed away on the side of the road and Daddy came home in a 1935 Dodge. Come to think of it, the Japanese might have sent it back to us in the form of bullets.

One more story concerning the Yeatts family: Grandpa Coleman Bennett Yeatts was held up by some men as he came back from selling tobacco in

Danville just as you turn from the Dry Fork Road onto the Powell Road. The men had gloves on, their faces were mostly covered and the part that was showing had been blackened with soot or something to color it black. Grandpa said when they were moving him to the tree to tie him up their sleeves slipped up and he could tell they were white. He was tied to an oak tree and was able to get loose just before a storm came. They were never caught and our grandparents were without the money from the sale of their tobacco.

A Couple of Old Car Stories

from Dr. Ernest Overbey

Tom Jones was in the transfer business here for many years — starting in the horse and buggy days. Later he purchased a great big seven passenger automobile. He never really learned to drive it too well — and soon after he got it — he cranked it up and before he could stop it he drove it right into the plate glass windows of J. W. Marks and Company Store — all the time he was hollering, “Whoa, whoa — dang it, I said whoa!”

Uncle Bill Tredway . . . married my mother’s sister, Ella Moore. Uncle Bill sold insurance for years in Chatham and the county. He knew people all over the county. He would often buy hams, eggs, chickens, etc., in the country and bring them home.

On one occasion, Johnny, his son, was driving him, and he bought a crate of frying size chickens — and put them in the trunk of the Model-T Ford. It was a steaming hot day in July.

When they arrived home, he opened the trunk and found four of the chickens had smothered. Uncle Bill instructed, “Johnny, don’t say anything.”

He called Aunt Ella and told her: “I have bought some nice frying size chickens, and already killed four for supper.” Johnny told later he couldn’t eat any, but “Pa” ate two.

*The above anecdotes came from an undated clipping of a **Star-Tribune** article titled “On The Humorous Side of Chatham . . .”*

Pittsylvania Historical Society Books

The Historical Society books are currently available for purchase from the following retailers. Suggested retail prices do not include shipping, handling, or tax.

Chatham Books
10 North Main Street
P. O. Box 71
Chatham, Virginia 24531
434-432-2488
chathambooks@gamewood.net

Mitchells Publications
P. O. Box 429
Chatham, Virginia 24531
434-432-0595
<http://www.MitchellsPublications.com>
answers@foodhistory.com

Shadetree Rare Books
P. O. Box 994
Chatham Antique Gallery
Chatham, Virginia 24531
434-432-1400
<http://www.ShadetreeRareBooks.com>
hhurt@adelphia.net

Maud Carter Clement, *History of Pittsylvania County* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$22.

Madelene Fitzgerald, *Pittsylvania Homes and History of the Past* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$18.

Roger Dodson, *Footprints from the Old Survey Books* (Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Madelene Fitzgerald and Frances Hallam Hurt, *18th Century Landmarks of Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Gray's *Map of Chatham, Virginia 1878* (Frameable Map) Suggested Retail Price: \$3.

Frances Hallam Hurt, *An Intimate History of the American Revolution in Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$15.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania County's Historic Courthouse: The Story Behind Ex Parte Virginia and the Making of a National Landmark* (Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania's Eighteenth-Century Grist Mills* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$23.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania's Nineteenth-Century Grist Mills* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$23.

Herman Melton, *Thirty-Nine Lashes Well Laid On: Crime and Punishment in Southside Virginia 1750—1950* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$22.

Judge Langhorne Jones, *Tales from a Small Town* (Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$5.